

Stay Calm and Content: No Matter What Life Throws at You

Cat Williams

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Cat Williams says that her new self-help book is different from all of the others. She's not writing to help readers identify their problems; she's writing to help them see their strengths. Through *Stay Calm and Content: No Matter What Life Throws at You*, this relationship counselor aims to show that maintaining high self-esteem is the key to resolving life's inevitable struggles.

In her direct, easy-to-read style, Williams not only defines self-esteem—a combination of self-worth, self-respect, and self-confidence—but goes on to show what that actually looks like in everyday situations. She shares illustrative stories from the counseling clients who taught her to see self-esteem as the core issue in many, if not all, of life's interactions.

The chapters are short and easy to dip into if one is looking for advice on a particular topic. Going to your in-laws for Thanksgiving dinner? Talking to your troubled teen? Emerging from the fog of bereavement? Williams addresses a wide range of human interactions through encapsulated case studies of people who have turned these difficult situations around.

Compelling though the personal stories may be, readers may wonder how true to life these vignettes are. Williams offers a caveat on their authenticity, citing client confidentiality as an explanation for her creative liberties, which include the unusual use of the first person to share her clients' experiences. Williams defends her choices, saying that "the stories in this book are fictional, but the positive changes that occur in the stories are similar to changes that have actually happened." After reading several that follow a predictable arc—a relationship problem followed by self-esteem-boosting exercises that lead to a satisfying solution—readers may long for more of the messy details that make real life so interesting.

Williams bolsters her arguments with quotations sprinkled liberally throughout the text. From Sam Walton's thoughts on leadership to Anne Sullivan's theories of education, Williams presents ideas on self-esteem that go beyond the realm of personal psychology. Along with references to her own sources—self-esteem pioneers Nathaniel Branden and Gael Lindenfield among them—the variety of perspectives lends authority to Williams's own writing.

Less effective choices include the use of tired phrases like "fit your own oxygen mask first" and "treat others as you would like to be treated." Many will also question the decision to print the book title in capital letters on an alarmingly bright red background. It is difficult to remain "calm and content" while looking at the outside of this book.

Inside, readers will find stories they share in common with the rest of humanity, along with a positive, forward-looking way of approaching life. Whether read straight through or in sections, *Stay Calm and Content* contains enough fresh wisdom to ensure that most readers will come away with valuable new ideas to apply in their own lives.

SHEILA M. TRASK (January 3, 2013)

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